

Archaeological Society of Central Oregon (ASCO) documents Pillar Petroglyph Site.

The Pillar Petroglyph Site is located on a west facing wall of canyon rimrock in the central Oregon outback. High above the canyon floor, the etched images gaze across the opposing sage plain toward the Cascade Mountains in the distance.



ASCO members Joanne Radeker and Celie Bryant monitor site conditions at the Pillar Petroglyph site prior to documentation.

The site consists of a series of some one hundred prehistoric designs and historic inscriptions scratched into the soft grey sandstone of the cliff face. No other cultural materials are present at the site to inform us about when the location may first have been visited, how often those visits may have occurred, or at what time of year. Similarly, little is known about the images themselves-- what they may represent, why they were produced, or the people who produced them.



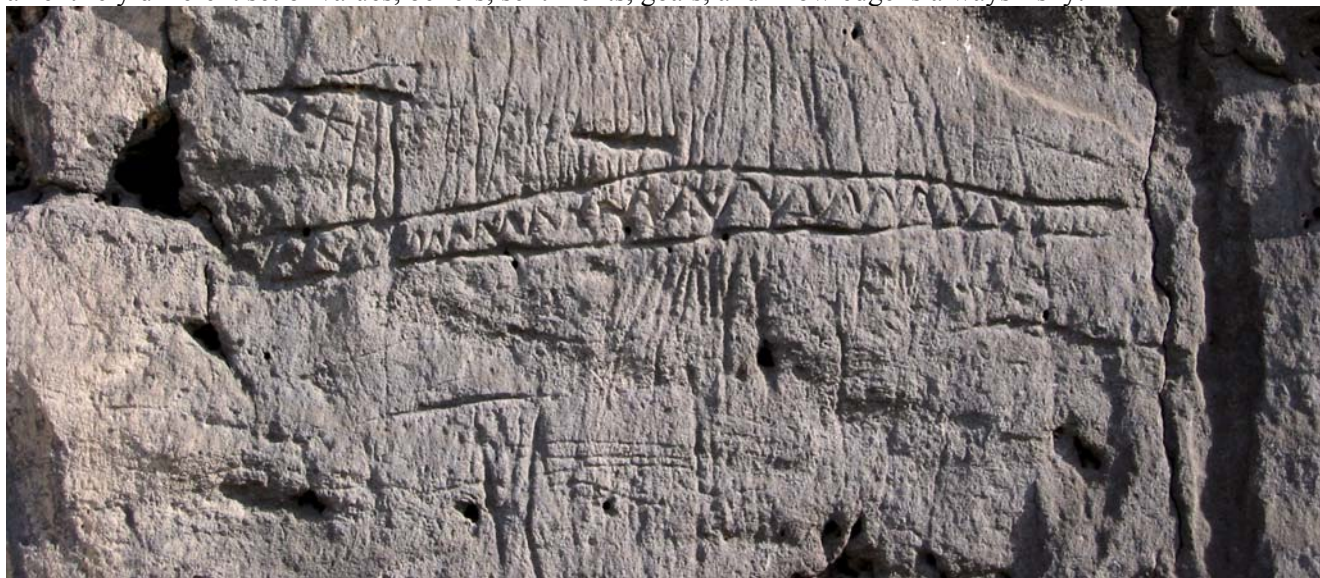
Most of the historic inscriptions are represented by names, initials, dates, and possibly examples of livestock brands. The inscription that reads, WH McCain 1908, may well be that of Walter McCain. Julian McCain and his wife Sarah moved to central Oregon and claimed a homestead north of the community of Prineville in 1886. The McCoins had five children, the youngest, Walter, being the only child of the family born at the central Oregon homestead. At the time the name and date were inscribed at the Pillar Petroglyph Site, Walter would have been in his late teens to early twenties.



In contrast to the historic inscriptions, the majority of early designs are depicted as zigzag lines, tally marks, crosses, rectilinear patterns and anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figures.



Those designs and figures, as well as similar images found at other locations, speak to the long term Native American presence in the area and their ties to the land. From the perspective of the present, the latter two examples noted may represent abstract portrayals of human or animal forms, spirits or mythical beings. However, attempts to interpret symbols and images created by a culture informed about the world it lived in by an entirely different set of values, beliefs, sentiments, goals, and knowledge is always risky.



What we do know about images left on cliffs and boulders and rock walls by prehistoric cultures is that, although they occur at many locations throughout the world as reflections of cultural reality, or symbols of individual expression, that occurrence is rare and generally limited to isolated locations. Places where they occur in the United States are often considered as extremely sensitive locations to local Indian communities. Similarly, because of their fragile, non-renewable nature we know that, once such places are damaged they are often irreparable, and once destroyed, irreplaceable. For those and other reasons, the Archaeological Society of Central Oregon (ASCO) approached the BLM about documenting the current condition of the Pillar Petroglyph site to preserve a record of the location as it exists today.

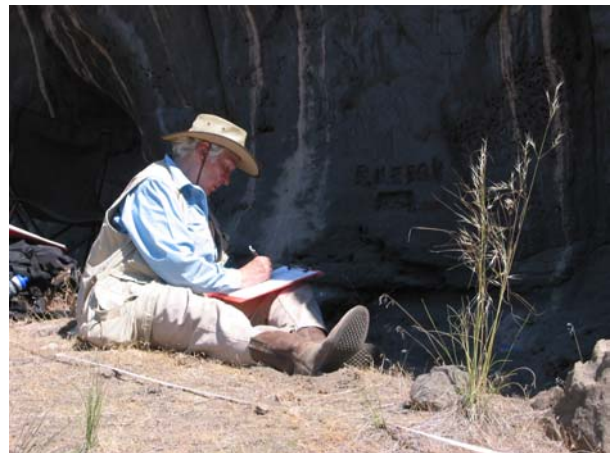


ASCO is a volunteer organization whose membership includes approximately 175 individuals. The group consists of amateur, avocational and professional archaeologists that share common interests in the history and prehistory of the area. ASCO members are active participants with local Federal land managing agencies during resource protection and preservation efforts and provide nearly 3000 hours of volunteer service each year. Part of that service is an on-going site stewardship program in which members monitor fifty four archaeological sites annually for the Prineville BLM, and Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests. Past efforts in which the group has been involved in association with BLM and Forest Service archaeologists include: field surveys of Paulina Caldera, lava tube caves, and Dry Canyon, restoration of vandalized pictographs east of Bend, Or., participation in Lake Billy Chinook Days and annual Oregon Archaeology Celebrations, and much more. One of the groups crowning achievements was working with Federal and State agencies, and a private landholder to transfer custody of Fort Rock Cave to the State Park system. ASCO members that participated in the Pillar Petroglyph site documentation were Bill and Ruth Bancroft, Paul Logan, Susan Gray, and Dick Bryant. Dick and his wife Celie also monitor the site several times a year to periodically assess site condition.

To record the Pillar Petroglyph site, the five member team of ASCO participants employed a number of field documentation procedures. With oversight by a BLM archaeologist, they identified the site location through a global positioning system (GPS), surveyed the area for evidence of other cultural materials, recorded site dimensions, produced field sketches and site maps, identified on-site vegetation, determined site elevation, slope, and aspect, and meticulously photographed the many etched images in the cliff face. Once the information collected from the field has been organized it will be used to complete a site record for the location. That record will then be forwarded to the State Historic Preservation Office to be included in their state-wide database of archaeological sites.



Susan Gray & Bill Bancroft discuss mapping strategies



Ruth Bancroft documents petroglyph images.



Dick Bryant photographing petroglyph panels.



The ASCO team documenting site dimensions.

The services that volunteer organizations such as ASCO contribute toward resource protection are invaluable. By giving freely of their time and expertise to assist the BLM and other Federal land managing agencies helps ensure that valuable information, sensitive site locations, and historic structures will be protected and preserved for future generations. The BLM is thankful for its on-going working relationship with the Archaeological Society of Central Oregon and appreciates the groups many civic minded and preservation activities.



The group pauses to regroup and soak-up some shade during the heat of the day. From L-R, Susan Gray, Ruth Bancroft, Bill Bancroft, Paul Logan, and Dick Bryant.

To the reader: Archaeological sites and objects on public lands are protected from Federal actions and random collecting activities by a host of cultural resource laws. The BLM manages those resources in a variety of ways; for their scientific values, sociocultural values, public values, and conservation values. Those sites and objects are fragile, non-renewable resources that constitute the material evidence by which archaeologists, historians, and members of other professional disciplines attempt to answer questions about the past. How and where materials are located at a site, their association with one another or lack of association, provides valuable information about past human behavior and events. As site materials disintegrate, or if they get picked up and disappear, gaps form in the archaeological record resulting in a less complete and accurate picture about past human activities. If you encounter archaeological materials while recreating on public lands, please leave them as you find them. Ultimately, because we are all part of the human experience, all archaeological sites and the materials therein, are about us.